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ABSTRACT

This issue highlights the undergraduate experience and the increasingly important role of student affairs professionals in creating educational environments that enhance student success. It compares college students in the 1960s to today's students, noting that attitudes and behaviors of today's students are different from those of previous generations. Today's students experience more stress, which is attributed to challenges of financing a college education and to being overwhelmed with responsibilities. There is an escalation in academic disengagement, with greater numbers of students requiring remedial or developmental education. While most high school seniors perform volunteer work, they are much less likely to participate in movements of greater scope in college. Today's students tend to feel unable to have traditional social lives. Most social life occurs in off-campus bars. Trustee leadership may be necessary to eliminate the alcohol-centered culture of fraternities. Student affairs professionals have shifted their emphasis from controlling students to serving students. Trustees are concerned with low retention and graduation rates, so student affairs staff must work to enhance academic engagement and student success. Students also need guidance from trustees and staff on developing proper values. Campuses must support student diversity and use it to enhance students' educational experiences. (SM)

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Number 15, Fall 2000

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BY CHARLES C. SCHROEDER

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Understanding Today's Students In a Changed World

BY CHARLES C. SCHROEDER

TO ENSURE THE VITALITY of their institutions, governing boards plan strategically, develop sound fiscal policies, approve major capital expenditures, review proposals for new academic programs, and strengthen their school's competitive edge through enrollment management. It goes without saying that these are important and necessary tasks for most college and university trustees.

Boards and student affairs committees can learn more about the vexing challenges of modern campus life.

But another important area too often overlooked is the student experience—the range of academic and campus experiences that shape the character of an institution for undergraduate students. This area has undergone dramatic changes over the past few decades that in many cases mirror the changes in our country's demographics and culture. This issue of *Priorities* highlights the nature of undergraduate experiences and the increasingly important role of student affairs educators in creating educational environments that enhance student learning and success.

Because almost every board decision affects students in some meaningful way, it is critically important that the board's student affairs committee maintain ongoing, open, and effective communication with the student affairs staff. As John E. Withers, chair of the student affairs committee at Austin College in Sherman, Tex., puts it: "The student affairs committee is an incredible asset to the board. The value lies in direct communication with student affairs professionals and students on a frequent and face-to-face basis."

Then and Now.

To help trustees understand the experience of contemporary college students, let's take a

Charles C. Schroeder is vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of Missouri at Columbia.

Today's students are a new breed. More students than ever are dealing with high levels of stress, demanding outside jobs, and various psychological disorders.

short trip down memory lane. Readers of this publication most likely attended college when I did—in the early 1960s. Reflect for a moment on the nature of your undergraduate experience: What are your most vivid memories?

In 1963, I entered a small, selective liberal arts college of some 1,100 students in Texas. My memories of my freshman year center on the rules, which seemed to outnumber the students. For example, freshmen were required to wear beanies during the first six weeks, and everyone attended compulsory Saturday classes. We were not allowed to have cars on campus, and housemothers routinely conducted bed checks to ensure that all women complied with the curfews. Administrators believed that the best way to control men was to force women into their residence halls by 11 p.m. on Sundays through Thursdays and by 1 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. There were clear rules against kissing your boyfriend or girlfriend goodnight on the dorm steps, and no one ever dreamed of coed dorms.

By 1967, the college allowed men and women to entertain members of the opposite sex in their rooms on Sunday afternoons. There was one catch: Your door had to be open at least a book's length. (Enterprising students used a matchbook to meet the requirement.)

Although many of my male friends consumed alcohol, there were very stringent regulations and expectations concerning drinking on campus. A student caught drinking or keeping alcohol in the dorm room would be immediately suspended.

Because more than 95 percent of students lived on campus, social life generally occurred within the boundaries of the institution. The student union not only was the place where we ate three meals a day, it also was the center of informal campus activities and occasional weekend dances chaperoned by administrators and a few faculty. Expectations about student conduct were clearly communicated during freshmen orientation, and the dean of men and dean of women consistently enforced campus rules. They acted *in loco parentis*, a doctrine that made explicit the institution's right to assume parental control with regard to student conduct.

My classmates were a relatively privileged, homogeneous lot—white, middle class, generally well prepared for college-level work, and moderately ambitious. Very few of my peers held outside jobs, and even fewer worked to pay for college. Everyone I knew took a full course load every semester and graduated in four years.

Most faculty were eager to spend time with students inside and outside the classroom. To this day, I recall strong personal relationships with faculty members willing to provide additional assistance in difficult courses, to discuss moral and philosophical issues, and to listen to my personal concerns and career aspirations.

In the early '60s, diversity on our campus was defined not in racial or ethnic terms but by the occasional "out of state" students from Arkansas and Louisiana. Only one of my peers was black (an exchange student from Africa), and very few were from divorced families. In fact, in 1963 only 8 percent of freshmen entering college nationwide came from divorced families; this year the figure is 39 percent. Finally, surveys of students who entered school in the '60s showed most went to college to develop a

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Illustration by R. S. Rogers

Questions for Trustees Recalling Their Own College Days

- **Were there dress codes and curfews for women?**
- **Were you involved in a political organization? Did you ever participate in a campus demonstration?**
- **Did most of your peers drink alcohol? How much, and how frequently?**
- **Were drinking patterns different for men and women?**
- **Did the dean of men patrol fraternity houses to enforce alcohol policies?**
- **Were freshmen on your campus referred to as "rats" and prohibited from having cars?**
- **How many hours, on average, did you study each week?**
- **Did your institution offer remedial courses in English and math?**
- **Did your classes include many students of color?**
- **Can you recall a faculty member who made a significant contribution to your personal development?**

philosophy of life; being financially secure ranked ninth. Today, surveys show the order of importance of these reasons is reversed.

Characteristics of Students Today.

Although the '60s and the years that followed were a period of demographic, economic, technological, social, and global changes, higher education changed as well. It abandoned its elitist orientation in favor of an egalitarianism that brought an access revolution fueled by an 8,000 percent increase in financial aid. As a result, enrollments quadrupled, curricular offerings mushroomed, and a multitude of highly specialized programs and services were created to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations. Today's students are indeed diverse, not simply in terms of age, ethnicity, part-time or full-time status, but in terms of expectations, attitudes, beliefs, learning styles, and social patterns.

During the past few years, the news media have constructed a national image of contemporary college students as an aimless, apathetic, and spoiled generation of slackers who detest hard work, snub political responsibility, and whine about their lot in life. Trustees and others who accept these stereotypes may come to believe that this generation of students has a poor work ethic, is more comfortable shopping or loafing than working or studying, and is essentially apolitical, apathetic, and overly materialistic. Fortunately, a great deal of evidence suggests that the media have misportrayed many of today's students.

A major source of information on contemporary students is generated annually by Alexander "Sandy" Astin, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. For more than 30 years, Astin and his staff, through their Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), have administered a national survey to more than 250,000 first-year students at some 500 two-year and four-year institutions. The results of these and other published surveys show that there indeed is a new breed of

Case Study

Learning Communities At the University of Missouri

Here is an example of a student affairs strategy in action:

With the arrival of a new chancellor in 1992, the University of Missouri-Columbia set a goal to "recapture the public's trust" by focusing attention on promoting student success through enhancing undergraduate experiences.

Enrollment and resident-hall occupancy had declined, resulting in the closing of three large residential complexes. Because housing occupancy had dropped from 6,200 to 4,100 residents, the board of curators (trustees) was concerned about the bond rating on residence-hall debt. Further, the state coordinating board had just established new performance criteria for retention and graduation rates and associated these rates with legislative funding.

To respond to these challenges, the vice chancellor for student affairs created educational partnerships between the college of arts and sciences, the department of residential life, the campus writing program, and the office of the provost. The goal was to design residential learning communities in hopes of substantially improving student success and helping the institution achieve various enrollment targets, including restoring residence-hall occupancy to previous levels.

Individuals from these areas formed cross-functional teams and created a number of Freshmen Interest Groups, or FIGs, as well as theme-oriented learning communities and residential colleges. These learning communities are designed to enhance entering students' transition to college; make the campus psychologically small by creating peer reference groups; encourage group identity development; provide an integrated learning experience for freshmen by connecting faculty, students, disciplines, and campus experiences in a purposeful, coherent, and seamless fashion; and enhance students' academic and social success.

The FIG program is constructed around such academic themes as Science and Society, America's Diversity, Spectrum of Behavior, Women in the 21st Century, Ancient People and Cultures, and so forth.

Each FIG exhibits the following elements:

- **Students are enrolled in three sequential courses and assigned to the same floor of a residence hall.**
- **The sequential courses fit the general education architecture—that is, all courses count toward all majors, and all the courses are currently on the books—no new courses were created. Further, many FIGs**

student on campus and that the behavior and attitudes of today's students are quite different from those of previous generations.

Here are some themes worth noting: Students today are experiencing higher levels of stress than students of any previous generation. The stress appears to be twice as high for women because they are concerned about financing college and developing successful career paths in highly competitive fields while maintaining many traditional female values. Regardless of gender, students' stress is attributed to the challenges of financing the high costs of a college education and to being "overwhelmed by all I have to do."

Unlike students of the '60s, 75 percent of contemporary college students have an outside job that requires them to work an average of 37 hours per week. Hence, balancing work responsibilities with academic obligations has become a major challenge. It also is worth noting that many students work to maintain a particular lifestyle that may include fashionable clothing or a new car. In addition to debts from student loans, many students ring up eye-popping credit-card debts. Data from *Student Monitor* show 59 percent of students who had a credit card expected to have debt at graduation, and the debt level was expected to top $17,000.

Entering students also are more psychologically precarious than those of previous generations, and increasing numbers seek personal counseling. Eating disorders, suicide attempts, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse and violence, and dysfunctional family experiences all are on the rise among college students. Staff psychologists also report more incidents of such stress-related disorders as depression, headaches, digestive problems, and hypertension. Fortunately, more students than ever are

include writing courses that integrate the content of other courses around the overall FIG theme.

• FIGs are relatively small learning communities with 15-20 students whose overall educational experience is coordinated by an upper class peer adviser or "PA." The peer adviser facilitates with a faculty or staff colleague a one-credit freshman seminar and serves as the "linking agent" between faculty and students to integrate the three courses.

• The PA lives on the floor with FIG students and organizes various activities directly linked to the academic theme of the FIG. These include service-learning activities, field trips, and guest speakers on topics related to the FIG.

The FIG program, as well as sponsored learning communities and residential colleges, were formed with the belief that freshman success could be enhanced by facilitating students' *incorporation* into university life and culture, encouraging *involvement* in educationally purposeful activities in and out of class, promoting effective *interaction* with faculty and peers, and assisting students in *integrating* diverse academic and campus experiences.

Results from six years of research conducted by the student affairs office show that these objectives were achieved. For example, FIG participants exhibited much greater levels of involvement with their peers and faculty and a higher degree of institutional commitment and academic and social integration than other students. Furthermore, FIG students demonstrated much higher gains in communication and general education outcomes than other students and achieved much higher grades, even when controlling for entering ability levels. Finally, FIG participants exhibited substantially higher retention and graduation rates—the result of enhanced incorporation, involvement, and interaction—and these rates were especially high for students of color.

The university found that residential learning communities not only enhanced student learning and success, but they also helped increase enrollment and residence-hall occupancy while simultaneously reestablishing adequate capital reserves to ensure positive bond ratings. For the past three years, all residence halls at the University of Missouri-Columbia have been full, and staff have reported waiting lists. This fall, more than 3,600 students are participating in 125 residential learning communities.

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engaging in stress-reducing activities such as exercise, recreation, and social activity.

A Disconnect in Teaching and Learning.

The CIRP and other national surveys also found an escalation in academic disengagement and greater numbers of students requiring remedial or developmental education. In Astin's survey, for example, 40 percent of students reported being "bored in class"; 63 percent said they came to class late; and more than 40 percent indicated they studied fewer than three hours per week while in high school. Fully one-third reported taking a basic-skills or remedial course in reading, mathematics, or writing.

These trends have not gone unnoticed by faculty. Faculty often view students as economically motivated, uncommitted to the inherent worth of liberal learning, and apathetic about many contemporary issues. Unfortunately, these perceptions contribute to the widening gap between how students best learn and how faculty teach.

For more than 20 years, I have conducted research on the relationship between student learning styles and faculty teaching styles. I found that more than half of today's students exhibit a learning pattern I call "concrete active." Students who exhibit this pattern perform best in a learning situation characterized by direct, concrete experience, moderate-to-high degrees of structure, and a linear, step-by-step approach to learning. They often have difficulty with complex concepts and ambiguity, are less independent in thought and judgment, and are more dependent on the wishes and ideas of those in authority.

Compared with their more traditional predecessors, they are more passive, display less

tolerance for diversity, are more dependent on immediate gratification, exhibit more difficulties with basic reading and writing skills, and value knowledge primarily for its practical utility. Concrete active learners often frustrate their teachers by asking questions such as, "Is that going to be on the test?", "How long does the paper have to be?", and "Why do I have to take English? I'm a marketing major."

Three-quarters of the faculty, conversely, exhibit a teaching style that not only is opposite of but often antagonistic to that of the concrete active learner. Their style is referred to as "abstract reflective." They prefer the global to the particular; are stimulated by the realm of concepts, ideas, and abstractions; love learning for learning's sake; and assume that students, like themselves, need a high degree of autonomy in their work.

When characteristics such as academic disengagement, inadequate preparation, and differing learning patterns are coupled with outside employment patterns, it is not surprising that students are taking longer to graduate.

Most faculty exhibit a teaching style that not only is opposite of but antagonistic to students' learning styles.

At my institution, only 28 percent of the students graduate in four years, though 60 percent graduate in six. On many campuses, course loads now average 13-14 hours per semester, and students are prone to drop courses more readily. In addition, students often find they are closed out of courses they need, while at the same time external mandates from various professional accrediting agencies have increased credit requirements for fields such as business and engineering.

National data also indicate that academic dishonesty is on the rise. In one survey of college-bound seniors, four of five said they had cheated, and the majority indicated that they did not consider this a serious ethical violation. Reports from various campuses confirm that cheating has reached epidemic proportions and that cheating on tests, downloading term papers off the Internet, and plagiarizing are common.

Civic Awareness and Attitudes.

In 1999, 76 percent of students performed some kind of volunteer work during their senior years in high school, according to CIRP data. But once they enroll in college, these students are much less likely to participate in movements of greater scope. They tend to be cynical about national politics and often are unfamiliar with national and world leaders and their views. Many do become involved in political activity and community service projects, but they do so within a circle of influence that is familiar and connected to their local interest. Indeed, contemporary students often "think globally and act locally." That is, many volunteer in local schools, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters.

With regard to other social attitudes, the data also revealed, however, that fewer students today believe it is important to "help promote racial understanding" than in previous years, while more respondents reported that "racial discrimination no longer is a problem."

National surveys also underscore the tremendous amount of campus tension and anxiety associated with multiculturalism and race relations. Columbia University Teachers College President Arthur Levine, in interviews conducted for his book *When Hope and Fear Collide*, found that students were much more willing to share the intimate details of their sex lives than to discuss multiculturalism and the status of race relations on their campuses. These concerns are particularly acute at large research and doctoral institutions, where there is increased evidence of racism, incivility, intolerance, and hostility toward different minority and international students—hostility that makes these students feel marginalized and isolated.

As institutions have become more diverse, there also has been a basic shift in the campus political climate. Traditional political groups have declined and been replaced by racial, ethnic, and gender support and advocacy groups. This new political climate has spawned increased student activism on such issues as high college costs, race-based scholarships, and multiculturalism.

New Patterns of Socializing.

The social life of contemporary college students also is quite different from that of previous generations. Because students feel overwhelmed in balancing work, academic obligations, and involvement in other activities, they often complain about their inability to have a "traditional social life." Furthermore, social connections and intimacy are taking on different patterns, and students are less likely to be paired off in couples and more likely to join group activities. Indeed, group dating, which provides protection from deeper involvement and intimacy, in many places has replaced traditional dating.

At most institutions, the vast majority of social life occurs off campus—often in local bars that encourage drinking through discounts and promotions. Clearly, social life for college students is lubricated by alcohol. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, almost half of all college students binge-drink (defined as five or more drinks at one sitting for men and four or more for women). Students who binge-drink are more likely to damage property, have trouble with authorities, miss class, experience hangovers, engage in unplanned sexual activity, and incur injuries. These consequences are terrible, not only for those who abuse alcohol, but also for those affected by the abuse. Dangerous drinking is particularly prevalent in fraternities because of the "alcohol-centered culture" of many Greek houses. On average, Greek men report being more than three times as likely to engage in "risky drinking" than independent men, and Greeks report almost twice as many negative consequences from their drinking.

Enter the Board of Trustees.

How can trustees obtain timely, relevant information on the impact of student characteristics on the undergraduate experience? What is the responsibility of student affairs educators in providing this information?

Because higher education has changed dramatically and become increasingly complex, student affairs professionals have redefined their roles and responsibilities. They have shifted their orientation from controlling students

to serving students—and recently to enhancing student *and* institutional performance. To fulfill these objectives, student affairs officials should be highly skilled and competent professionals who are knowledgeable about applicable legal constraints, new theoretical approaches to facilitate learning and development, and comprehensive methods of assessing student satisfaction, engagement, and other educational outcomes. They also should work closely with academic administrators, faculty, students, and others.

The institution's student affairs office should include staff members who are experts on students, their environments, and the teaching and learning processes. They need not know individual students' names, but they should grasp the evolving group profile of the student body. Student affairs staff can help board members obtain an overall picture of students or offer insights into special subgroups of students. For example, when an institution begins to admit a larger percentage of minority students, international students, or other special populations, the board can call on student affairs professionals to help faculty, administrators, and trustees find new ways of supporting the new constituencies.

Student affairs staff members should be alert to changes in the "mood" of the campus. They should know how students spend their time and whether students are using the institution's resources to the best educational advantage. They should monitor whether institutional policies and practices enhance or detract from learning and personal development. Moreover, student affairs staff should integrate data about student performance from faculty and others with their own observations of students' experiences and disseminate this information regularly to the student affairs committee of the board. Such information helps trustees understand the relationship among students' characteristics, their experiences, and desired institutional outcomes, such as net revenue targets and graduation rates.

Another aspect that trustees can focus on is the way in which the student affairs office is integrated into the larger institution. Rockford College in Illinois, for example, recently opened its Center for Student Success to provide centralized services to students, especially the commuters and nontraditional students who make up two-thirds of the college's enrollment. By combining academic advising and career services, along with services for new

Student affairs professionals have shifted their orientation from controlling students to serving them—and recently to enhancing student and institutional performance.

students, international students, and students with disabilities, Rockford's student services and academic affairs staffs have jointly enhanced the campus's nonacademic offerings in a way that, officials hope, will raise the retention rate.

In addition to boosting the college's "customer service" ethic, the center provides logical linkages between academic and student services so that students find support throughout their time at the college, especially at key points of transition—matriculation and graduation.

Trustees also can stay in touch with important student and campus-life issues by having students regularly attend meetings of the board's student affairs committee. This has been a long-standing practice at Austin College, among many other institutions, and Austin trustee Honey Minshew says that "student input has helped shape policies that ensure a healthy campus community and a vibrant campus life." Minshew not only stays in tune with students and their concerns through discussions at committee meetings, but she also participates in community service projects sponsored by a student affairs office outreach program.

Minshew has accompanied students on trips to impoverished villages in Mexico, Navajo Indian reservations, and an inner-city neighborhood in New Orleans. She says she has "really gotten to know our students at a much deeper level, and through our immersion experiences, I've learned how much today's students really care about helping others, especially the underprivileged and disadvantaged."

Addressing High-Risk Drinking.

Trustees should expect student affairs educators to help them address campus-drinking problems. Although eliminating underage drinking from campus is a desirable goal, it may be an unrealistic expectation. However, encouraging students to drink safely and responsibly should be a top priority. The board should declare unequivocally the inappropriateness of dangerous, high-risk drinking on campus. Commitment and leadership from individual trustees are vital, and on some campuses, trustee leadership may be necessary to help eliminate the alcohol-centered culture of fraternities.

What can trustees do to address this problem? First, in collaboration with the president and student affairs staff, trustees should advocate substance-free housing for all Greek organizations, as did the University of Kentucky board in 1998. As a result, the university recorded many positive changes: Grade-point averages have increased for fraternity members; retention is significantly higher in many fraternities; recruitment numbers have increased dramatically; damage to frat houses has declined significantly; and more men want to live in chapter houses.

Other campuses have noted similar positive outcomes, and many student affairs officials report that Greek alumni now are more willing to invest in house renovations when they are confident that members will take good care of the facility.

Similar concerns about alcohol abuse, incivility, and the relationship of the Greek system to the academic mission of the institution prompted the board of trustees of Bucknell University in Pennsylvania to address the role of sororities and fraternities in Bucknell's campus life. According to Board Chair James W. Schubauer, the objective is to "define the responsibilities, guidelines, policies, and expectations" of the campus's sororities and fraternities. Leadership for developing the plan fell to trustee Norman Garrity, chair of the board's Greek affairs committee. Garrity faced three immediate challenges: concern that the board was taking the lead and becoming too intrusive, varying perspectives and philosophies about the role of fraternities and sororities at the institution, and a lack of clear benchmarks for prominence of Greek life. The committee addressed these and other issues by identifying 15 key stakeholder groups and developing an open and inclusive process for engaging them in creating a strategic plan.

All major stakeholders—Greek students, alumni, non-Greek students, faculty, staff, trustees, and parents—were represented on the steering committee. Within one year, the steering committee developed a comprehensive and innovative plan that included 48 specific initiatives aimed at making Bucknell's Greek system exemplary. As a result of the process, Garrity realized that "the Greek affairs area on most

Case Study

At Elon College, Trustees and Students Look for Common Ground

At the start of each academic year, someone forwards an e-mail around campuses that points out jocularly that the entering freshmen come from a generation very different from that of the faculty. This year's stated, for example, that the expression "you sound like a broken record" has no meaning to freshmen because they never owned a record player. (The compact disc was introduced in 1982, when today's freshmen were a year old.) While humorous, these messages also make the underlying point that our educational policies should address the characteristics and experiences of the students entering our institutions.

At Elon College, a comprehensive independent institution of 4,100 students in North Carolina, the vice president for student life and the chair of the board's campus-life committee designed a program to give trustees a better understanding of this generation of students. It was unveiled at the spring 2000 board meeting, as the college was in the initial stages of developing a new strategic plan.

The college's division of academic affairs, in consultation with student-life staff, already had engaged students, faculty, and staff in an "academic summit" and ongoing discussions about the intellectual and social climates of the campus. These conversations illuminated differing expectations and attitudes. Students, for example, said they valued relationships with faculty over grades and wanted a better understanding of how their classroom assignments connected with outcomes. Faculty said they hoped students would be more interested in intellectual pursuits and would spend more time learning a course's content before applying the new knowledge.

The summit led to the formation of an economics seminar to research the hypothesis that today's students make choices different from those of students of the '60s and '70s because their environments (incentives) differ, not their values. The results of this research set the stage for bringing students and trustees together to discuss how Elon could better engage students in learning.

The seminar students were invited to speak with the trustees at the campus-life committee meeting on the topic: "A Multigenerational Description of College Students: How Elon Is Responding to Students of the '90s." Students and trustees first completed a questionnaire asking for such things as which world or national events shaped their generation (students mentioned the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the 1986 Challenger explosion); the items equipping the

campuses is a vitally important one, yet it is usually understaffed and suffers from inadequate resources. It is clearly the board's responsibility to address these issues."

Garrity suggests that trustees of other institutions consider following Bucknell's lead by "creating forums for openly and candidly discussing Greek-life issues and addressing the concerns in a collaborative, straightforward fashion."

On some campuses, trustee leadership may be necessary to help eliminate the alcohol-centered culture of fraternities.

Because alcohol abuse does not occur solely in Greek houses, trustees should work with student affairs officials to advocate creation of high-level task forces that can marshal various community resources to reduce inappropriate use of alcohol by college students. Dr. Henry Wechsler of the Harvard School of Public Health has created a 12-step program that provides a template for this kind of campus-community intervention. Similarly, Bucknell University has substantially reduced high-risk drinking through the "President's Ten-Point Program."

Improving Retention And Graduation Rates.

On campuses throughout the country, trustees are increasingly concerned about low retention and graduation rates. Consequently,

residence-hall rooms (trustees mentioned an alarm clock and slide rule); whether they as students worked a part-time job, did volunteer service, studied abroad, or signed on for an internship; and what they expected to gain from their degree (students said getting a job; trustees said preparation for a profession).

The discussion was open and lively. The group concluded that the main differences between the world of today's students and that of their predecessors was that the guarantee of success previously associated with an undergraduate degree is less clear, learning styles are more active, and lifestyles have changed. Of course, social policies, information access, and the range of services offered by colleges today differ markedly from those in the trustees' college days.

The seminar participants made a compelling case that choices between devoting time to academic or social activities would be the same for trustees and students if each were placed in the other's environments—that is, if each had the other's time-saving devices, technology, economic conditions, and choice of activities. Interestingly, the students said they valued the overall educational experience, viewing classroom learning as only one of several educational activities that prepare them for life after college.

The trustees said the meeting broadened their thinking. They felt that knowledge of the characteristics and experiences of today's students was essential for developing an educational experience that inspires engagement in and out of the classroom. As the campus-life committee chair put it: "While today's students have more opportunities, they also have more challenges. It is important for us to understand our students so we can provide the kind of comprehensive educational experience that will prepare them for success in an increasingly complex world."

With the demise of in loco parentis and the rise of diverse student populations, institutions need a new approach to defining campus community and the duties and obligations students must assume.

student affairs staff and academic officials are working together on many campuses to enhance academic engagement and student success. Many of these efforts have been guided by a new document published by the American College Personnel Association, "The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs." The paper argues that "the key to enhancing learning and personal development is not simply for faculty to teach more and better, but also to create conditions that motivate and inspire students to devote more time and energy to educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom." The document urges student affairs educators to work with their faculty colleagues to make the learning process more seamless.

The concept of seamless learning implies that undergraduate activities and experiences traditionally assumed to be unrelated—such as courses and out-of-class activities, or on-campus and off-campus experiences—can be intentionally arranged to be mutually supporting, thereby promoting higher levels of student learning. A "learning community" is a prime example of a seamless learning environment because it connects, in an intentional and complementary fashion, students' formal curricular experiences with their informal campus activities. These learning communities motivate and inspire students to be more intellectually engaged with one another, their faculty, and the educational opportunities offered by their institutions. The results are higher levels of learning productivity, increased retention and graduation rates, and more satisfied students.

Promoting Proper Values.

Many campuses experience random acts of incivility, intolerance, bigotry, cheating, alcohol abuse, sexual harassment, and violence. Trustees, in turn, often are placed in the position of reviewing campus judicial codes and disciplinary procedures. Although boards certainly must monitor such codes and procedures, getting closer to the roots of these problems means advocating for an increased campus focus on education for proper values.

With the demise of *in loco parentis* and the rise of diverse student populations, it is clear that we need a new approach to defining campus community and the duties and obligations students must assume when they join our communities. Clearly, students are coming to us from family and community situations in which the old boundaries are gone. Our society offers a multitude of lifestyles, and students are learning and choosing those they believe to be the most appropriate. Increasingly, they hunger to be guided through what Harvard University psychologist Bill Perry calls the "sea of relativism."

Unlike students of the '60s, according to Will Willimon, dean of the chapel at Duke University, students today "do not seem possessed by the search for freedom. They seem much more interested in the search for roots, stability, order, and identity." Such a search quite natu-

rally impels educators to help students develop coherent values and ethical standards. The need for such an approach was recently highlighted by the Kellogg Commission Report, "Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience," which said: "The biggest educational challenge we face revolves around developing character, conscience, citizenship, tolerance, civility, and individual and social responsibility in our students. We dare not ignore this obligation in a society that sometimes gives the impression that values such as these are discretionary. These should be part of the standard equipment of our graduates, not options."

While some campuses instituted speech and conduct codes to address the preceding issues, the student affairs staff at the University of South Carolina took a very different approach. It created a large, campuswide committee that worked for months to produce an institutional values statement called the "Carolinians' Creed," a statement that expresses the values to which the university expects its students to adhere in their peer relationships. (It is available at www.sa.sc.edu/creed.)

The document is simple and is written in language students can understand and relate to. Perhaps most important, the creed is not a list of "don'ts" but rather a set of expectations ("do's") that help students understand, appreciate, and live the values of civility, compassion, empathy, and openness. It is printed in virtually every university publication, and it is the focal point of new student orientation. The board of trustees, along with the faculty senate, student senate, and the parents association, was instrumental in adopting and endorsing this unique institutional values statement.

Faculty use the creed in their courses to underscore the importance of academic integrity and personal responsibility. Since implementing the creed, student affairs staff at South Carolina have reported dramatic decreases in incivility, intolerance, and inappropriate behavior on the part of undergraduates.

Questions for Boards to Consider

Who are your students? What are they like, what do they know, and what do they need when they arrive at your institution? What do they gain as a result of their undergraduate experiences?

- **How do your students spend their time, and how does that influence certain educational outcomes?**
- **Do different groups of students—students of color, Greeks, athletes, adult learners—exhibit differences in retention rates, graduation patterns, and learning outcomes? If so, why?**
- **What conditions, experiences, and activities influence the success of student learning at your institution?**
- **What do your student affairs programs, services, policies, and staff contribute to student learning and success?**
- **Do your residence halls help or hinder student learning?**
- **Does your institution have a values statement? Do academic and campus experiences emphasize education for proper values?**

Reaping the Benefits of Diversity.

Our diverse student bodies offer unique challenges and opportunities. Undergraduates at the nation's colleges will increase by 2.6 million by 2015, according to a new study, "Crossing the Great Divide: Can We Achieve Equity When Generation Y Goes to College?" Of this increase, two million, or roughly 77 percent, will be students of color. The largest absolute gains will come from Hispanic students, and four states—California, Texas, Florida, and New York—will account for two-thirds of the increase. Estimates are that fully 20 percent of these students will come from families below the poverty line and, therefore, will have serious financial-aid needs. Many also will need additional academic support in terms of remedial mathematics and English.

Estimates also suggest that 57 percent of these students will be women. This figure represents a dramatic rise from the single-digit percentages of female students common on campuses in the 1960s (when fewer women expected to have careers) and is attributable to a sense that females "are more likely than their male peers to hold high educational aspirations, to enroll in college, and to attain a college degree," according to a recent study by the American Council on Education, "Gender Equity in Higher Education."

The rise in female students has prompted some social commentators to charge that male students now are victims of discrimination, raising the possibility of tensions on campus. The apparent gender gap, however, "masks tremendous differences by academic level, age, race and ethnicity, and income," the ACE report says. Men, for example, are still the majority in doctoral and professional programs, and while women account for the bulk of candidates seeking master's degrees, large numbers of them are concentrated in the fields of education and health.

All of these trends will challenge institutions to provide adequate financial aid, modify the curriculum to respond to diverse cultural needs and preferences, and increase the number of faculty and staff members of color. The trends also offer unique opportunities to enhance the overall student experience.

A number of national studies have demonstrated that all college students learn better in settings where they are confronted with others who are different from themselves. University of Michigan psychologist Patricia Gurin, for example, found that students who experience the most racial and ethnic diversity in classrooms and during interactions on campus score higher on tests used to measure complex thinking, are more motivated to achieve, have greater intellectual self-confidence and engagement, and display the highest level of interest in earning graduate degrees. Furthermore, says Gurin, these students are more likely to develop the ability to understand the ideas and feelings of others, which in later life may make them more likely to live in racially diverse communities, maintain friendships with people of different races, and be able to function more effectively in diverse workplaces.

The challenge facing most institutions is how to foster greater interactivity among the diverse campus groups. Herein lies the opportunity: To reap the full educational benefits of diversity, student affairs officials should encourage and reinforce "difficult dialogues" concerning race, equality, and community. They should actively advocate, in concert with the student affairs committee of the board, the creation of an inclusive campus community—one that is welcoming and accepting of all. To accomplish this objective, student affairs staff should use "campus climate" surveys in developing strong diversity plans and protocols. They also should use community service activities, service learning, learning communities, clubs, and organizations to help students engage in these "difficult dialogues." Finally, student affairs staff should help trustees understand the policy, program, and service implications of becoming an increasingly diverse campus.

Ensuring Vitality.

An analysis of results of the National Survey of Student Engagement, released in November 2000, says most students rate their institutions as "supportive and responsive, a sign that colleges and universities are making welcoming, affirming learning environments for all students." But the study goes on to note that student satisfaction rates often decline as freshmen become upperclassmen and begin to encounter the frustrations of campus bureaucracy.

If positive satisfaction rates are to be achieved and maintained, institutional leaders must expect conscious, concerted efforts by their student affairs professionals as well as their boards. As both of these parties strive to understand the changing nature of college students and the important role of campus life, they are not only helping to create educational experiences and environments that promote student learning and success, they are helping ensure the future vitality of their institutions. ◆

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This Issue

Serving Today's Students

BY SUSAN WHEALLER

When I joined the faculty of Rockford College in 1982, the college's dean of students was a delightful man—an ordained minister with a Ph.D. in religion. Quick to acknowledge that he had no training in student affairs other than raising his own children, he nonetheless worked effectively with students, a kind of fatherly authority figure in true *in loco parentis* style. He taught in the college's department of philosophy and religion, and somehow still had the energy to deal with the college's 800 or so students, most of whom fell into the traditional 18-to-22-year-old range. A motherly secretary, a part-time campus chaplain, a few nurses, and three resident-hall directors rounded out the office of the dean.

When I left the college this summer to join AGB, this office had changed significantly, starting with the name: No longer the office of the dean of students, it is now the office of student services. That focus on service reflects one of the catalysts for the changes that have occurred on campuses around the country, prompting educators to rethink and restructure to support modern-day student needs in such areas as residential community living, career planning, psychological counseling, health care, and computer technology.

Because of the increasingly important role student services plays in attracting, retaining, and educating students, this issue of *Priorities* examines today's college students and what their needs mean to institutions in terms of staff, budget, and policy. Charles C. Schroeder, vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of Missouri at Columbia, paints a portrait of the modern student body and invites readers to compare the culturally diverse, overstressed, and often underprepared nature of this group to that of their own freshman classes. He compares student learning styles and faculty teaching styles, revealing a "disconnect" that for many students leads to academic disengagement and a longer matriculation-to-graduation timeframe. Schroeder also chronicles changes in students' social environments—the rise in alcohol abuse in particular—offering advice on what trustees can do to curb the problems.

Schroeder also points to good practices in student services. Whether promoting community values or reinforcing the academic program, colleges and universities nationwide are finding meaningful ways to enhance students' educational experiences by dovetailing programs and services. This attention can bring big payoffs in enhanced student engagement—more students living on campus, improving academic performance, persisting to graduation, and becoming active alumni. All of these good practices contribute to an institution's budget, reputation, and vitality, which is why this discussion deserves serious attention from boards.

—Susan Whealler is AGB's director of private-sector programs

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